

March 15, 1962

EYES ONLY

Dear General Clay:

We are of course following the situation in the corridors on an hourly basis here, and I am aware of your differences with General Norstad. On balance, in the situation as it stands so far, I have found myself in agreement with General Norstad and I have accordingly approved his recommendations. I believe we have sustained our essential positions coolly and effectively, but each day may bring new tests and new decisions, and if stronger measures appear to me to be necessary, I shall not hesitate to order them.

Meanwhile, I want to say three things to you. One is that even when your opinion is not shared and your advice not taken, your candid and determined comments are of great value. We need to know what alternative courses are available, and what the contending arguments are, in this kind of situation, and it is a matter of great importance to me that your voice, which must always be heard, is on the line from Berlin. This importance may not be easy for you to understand, in situations in which you might well feel that mistakes are being made and your own convictions lightly overridden -- but I assure you that it is so.

My second point is that I greatly value the loyalty and self-discipline with which you and your colleagues in Berlin are doing your level best to support our whole course of action, even when parts of it do not command your personal approval. This is no more than I have learned to expect from men of your quality and profession, but I want you to know that I recognize and admire it in action. Moreover, the clear impression of determination, calmness and unity which we have all sought to convey in recent actions is, I think,

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a major element in the success which we have had in sustaining air access and making Soviet tactics ineffective so far.

Finally, I repeat that Max Taylor will be coming with my particular instruction to talk over with you all matters of importance relating to Berlin and to your own position. I have thought of asking you to come back here for such a discussion, but in the light of the continuing problem of the corridors, I think it better for you not to leave your post at this time.

With warm personal regards,

Sincerely,

JFK

The Honorable Lucius Clay
Special Representative of the President
U. S. Mission, Berlin